



The Appreciative Inquiry Summit

Explorations into the Magic of Macro-Management and Crowdsourcing

Guest Editors: David Cooperrider, Lindsey Godwin, Brodie Boland and Michel Avital

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Each issue, a leading AI practitioner will present a topic of their choice

Feature Choice

Feature Choice by Jacqueline Wong

Re-Appreciating Inquiry: The Dragonfly Framework as a Generative Metaphor for Planning and Change

ABSTRACT

Bearing in mind that AI can be both an action-research tool and an organisation development methodology can make us more mindful and intentional about how and when we use it, and not be blind to its weaknesses or strengths. Jacqueline Wong writes about her own learning journey and experiences in applying AI, as well as advancing the theory and practice of AI through Sequoia Group's consulting work.

The purpose of this article is to share some of my own learning journey and experiences in applying Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a practitioner and what my colleagues at Sequoia Group have done to advance the theory and practice of AI through our consulting work.

There is no perfect process or methodology, but if we keep in mind that AI can be both an action-research tool and an organisation development methodology, we will be more mindful and intentional about how and when we use it, and not be blind to its weaknesses or strengths. We also need to keep in mind the fact that inquiry is fateful. Living systems grow in the direction of whatever we study and there is no such thing as a neutral question. Whatever we choose to do must be in service of the well-being of the systems we are studying. This is our ethical responsibility.

Whatever its criticisms, we now know that AI works and it is a non-prescriptive discipline. It is both an art and a science. We all have so many stories to share and learn from – what we need to master is the art of harvesting these stories in ways that can help advance both theory and practice. Every story is a good story, but not everyone can be a good story teller. I hope I can do justice to the people and organisations I will be mentioning in this article and capture the essence of these stories as well as I can. I hope that this will also spark further dialogue and innovations in your own AI practitioner community.

The flow of the article

I will begin by briefly reiterating the principles of AI. My goal is to emphasise the need for practitioners to put these principles front and center in any AI intervention. I will then share a framework that my colleagues at Sequoia have used as a living-system metaphor to guide clients in large scale strategic planning projects. The framework has also enabled us to circumvent the 'positive' versus 'negative' discourse and allows us to 'hold the space' or creative



It is important to build upon the foundations of the principles and keep them front and center in all AI interventions.

tension between current and desired reality; internal and external forces; and adaptive and generative planning approaches.

In the concluding section, I will reiterate some of the insights and implications that emerged for me as I reflect on how and where I use AI, and some possible next steps for the community.

Re-appreciating the principles of Appreciative Inquiry

As we seek to improve our practice and innovate ways to make AI work in different contexts, it is important to build upon the foundations of the principles and keep them front and center in all AI interventions. AI works when we stay true to the principles.

One of the most poetic and accessible descriptions of the principles of Appreciative Inquiry I have come across was in the book *Appreciative Inquiry: a Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity* by Frank Barrett and Ronald Fry (2010). They added a sixth principle to the original five principles described by David Cooperrider:

The principles of Appreciative Inquiry	
<i>Constructionist principle</i>	As we talk, so we make real
<i>Principle of simultaneity</i>	As we ask questions, so we become transformed
<i>Poetic principle</i>	As we choose topics of inquiry, so we open new horizons of action
<i>Anticipatory principle</i>	As we anticipate, so we create the future
<i>Positive principle</i>	As we discover moments of hope, joy and caring, so we enjoy generative experiences
<i>Narrative principle</i>	As we weave stories, so we create lasting bonds

The essence of these principles is the affirmation of human systems capacity to learn and co-create reality. In a nutshell the principles of AI point towards the notion of generativity.

Generativity refers to a system's capacity to create, generate or produce new content unique to that system without additional help or input from the system's original creators. Simply stated, generativity is a living system's capacity to learn, grow and regenerate itself.

Human beings are aspirational creatures in part because of our capacity to make meaning of our experiences and because of our ability to compose and communicate these with one another. This capacity for composition and communication in turn enables innovation and progress. Language and imagination cannot be separated. When we learn to do this together in community, we make meaning of our collective experiences and unleash the capacity to learn from the past, the present and even the future. Learning is therefore the very essence and purpose of Appreciative Inquiry.

Arie de Geus, one of the pioneers of scenario planning at Shell, first presented the notion of the 'learning organisation' in his book, *The Living Company* (1999), to affirm the fact that only living systems can learn. Peter Senge and

Learning systems or organisations have the capacity to learn and re-create reality – whether we realise it or not, the potential is there in the first place.

his colleagues at MIT's Center of Organizational Learning¹ also shared the concept of the learning organisation, as 'a place where its people are committed to constantly enhancing their collective capacity to create the results they truly desire.' If we unpack the words in this definition, learning systems or organisations have the capacity to learn and re-create reality – whether we realise it or not, the potential is there in the first place.

One of the central quests of organisational design (OD) and organisational scholarship is to learn how to access this latent collective learning potential, and do it at speed and scale that resonates with all its members, without further dividing or alienating them. If it is true that people commit to what they help create, then generativity and ownership can only come about when the members of any system are involved in the meaning-making process itself.

Introducing Sequoia's Dragonfly Framework

In 2006, we were invited by the National Trade Union Congress, the largest NGO in Singapore with over 500,000 members at that time, to help chart a process and co-create a shared vision that could resonate with three generations of union leaders and members.

The vision of NTUC in 2006 was to be a 'Labour Movement for All', an all-inclusive labour movement that to help create 'a better and more meaningful life where working people of all colours, all ages, and all nationalities can live, work and play together in Singapore.' We used AI as a process and created a cascading conversation that enfolded ever-increasing circles of stakeholders in dialogues. At its peak, the conversation involved thousands of union leaders and heads of social enterprises affiliated to the NTUC.

The Labour Movement created a strong alignment and further strengthened Singapore's unique model of tripartism, and regenerated its vision to keep up with changing times. Appreciative Inquiry was credited with creating lasting bonds in a transformational meeting amongst the very top 27 leaders of NTUC, led by the Secretary-General, Minister Lim Swee Say. Four years into the transformation, Sequoia is still involved in helping to conduct year-long Positive OD programmes for industrial relations officers and union executives, so as to sustain and extend the capacity for positive change.

Building and bridging communities in Singapore

Subsequently, in 2008, we were invited to replicate a similar process with the People's Association, representing the grassroots movement in Singapore, after their corporate planning director heard about what we did with NTUC. Their mission is to 'build and bridge communities for one people, one Singapore'. The only difference was the challenge of scale. The PA has 31,000 grassroots leaders, many times that of NTUC, and it is to date the most pervasive community organiser in Singapore.

The grassroots movement has a long history; many senior grassroots leaders have contributed greatly to building the nation. The purpose of the intervention was to re-energise the movement and sensitise people to the critical challenges confronting our changing social fabric, while honouring the best of the past and present. Our clients at PA understood that while it was important to honour past contributions, it was just as important to have a process that allowed them

1 It subsequently became the SoL, the Society of Organizational Learning.

Local level plans for building social capital emerged from every group representative constituency and single constituency of Singapore.

to talk about the critical external driving forces impacting our society, and to have honest and open dialogues about the strengths and weaknesses of the grassroots movement at that time.

Taking these into consideration, we decided to use the Sequoia Dragonfly framework as a guide and taught the framework through what we came to call the 'Enabling Workshops'. The aim of the Enabling Workshops was to propagate a 'toolkit' for a one-day workshop for engaging key grassroots leaders in local level strategic planning conversations, so that every community is given a chance to create a ground-up vision and strategic plan that is relevant, important and inspiring to the people themselves. The idea was to liberate the potential of the grassroots in engaging communities and to spread the Vision for the Community through positive conversations and self-directed planning.

Even though we could not conduct a summit for 31,000 leaders in one room, what resulted was the equivalent of mini-local level summits at the GRCs and local constituency level. Engagement reached a tipping point and even the advisers of opposition wards were engaged to generate plans for advancing the quality of social and community relationships amongst residents of Singapore. As a result, local level plans for building social capital emerged from every group representative constituency (GRCs) and single constituency of Singapore, and these were all submitted to the Prime Minister at a grassroots alignment seminar a year later. These plans were to be championed by the local level ministers, members of Parliament and grassroots leaders and advisers.

This was probably the most extensive strategic planning processes our nation has ever engaged in and was subsequently captured in the publication called 'We Are One – The People's Association Journey – 1960 to 2010'.

The framework and its key elements

This framework comprises five key elements – Awareness, Aspirations, Alignment, Accountability and Authenticity. The four driving forces for change are represented by the wings of the Dragonfly – Awareness, Aspirations, Alignment and Accountability. The body of the Dragonfly is Authenticity – represented by purpose and values.

While the four wings provide the energy for change and transformation, the body of the dragonfly is the brain center that controls the direction of the flight, much as an organisation's core purpose and values provides a gravitational clarity for why it exists and what it stands for.

Overlaying the framework in the outer arrows that connect the four phases is the 4-D cycle, the Appreciative Inquiry model – Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. If the 4-As represent the 'what', the 4-Ds represent the 'how' of the transformation process. Discovery leads to Awareness, and Aspirations bring us towards our Dreams. Design enables Alignment while Accountability results in our destiny.

These '5-As' can also be applied at an individual level as leadership capacities or disciplines. The following table provides a summary of the elements as it applies to individual appreciative leadership. These capabilities are also imbued into the strategic planning methodology, which we will describe in greater detail in the next section.

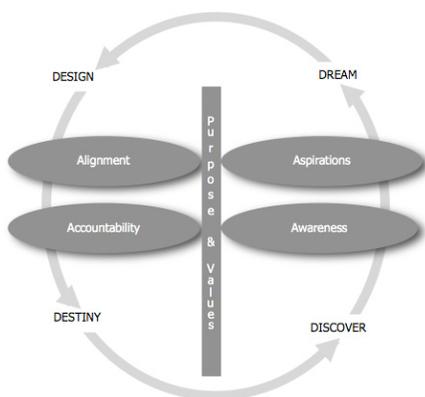


Figure 1 Sequoia's Dragonfly framework, a metaphor for how living systems learn, change and regenerate themselves

Capacities for Appreciative Leadership

If we 'double-click' on each of the 5-As, we can further define the focal outcomes at each phase of the process in the form of the '10-Is', which are a result of practicing the 5-As.

Leadership capacities: the 5-As	Focal outcomes: the 10-Is
<i>Awareness</i> Awareness is about living consciously and attuning to one self, while being conscious and mindful of the external world. Awareness allows the leader to exercise foresight, which is a critical quality and qualifier of leadership.	Insights and Implications
<i>Aspirations</i> Aspirations is about the capacity to visualize, create and garner movement towards a more important future possibility. Leaders who cultivate this capacity in themselves know that the real source of energy for change comes from holding a picture of what might be that is more important than what is.	Inspiration and Imagination
<i>Alignment</i> The third capacity is about the leaders' capacity to forge an alignment of strengths in service of the purpose of their organization. They see the strengths that exist today and strengths that are latent. It is about being able to name and give life to what the organization and the community can become best in the world at.	Innovation and Improvisation
<i>Accountability</i> Accountability is about cultivating a deeper sense of ownership and belonging. What we truly own we will care for and steward. Accountability is not about creating more scorecards and key performance indicators. It is about fostering shared ownership for the outcomes that have meaning and value to us.	Influence and Impact
<i>Authenticity</i> Authenticity is about the genuineness of one's being. It is about having the courage to be oneself in the face of endless demands to be someone else. Authentic leaders are guided by a deeper internal compass comprising their core values and purpose, from which all other choices spring. It is also the body of the dragonfly and the control centre that determines the direction.	Integrity and Impeccability

Combining adaptive and generative approaches to planning

The guiding idea behind adaptive planning is the notion that organisations need to adapt to their environment in order to evolve and survive. Adaptive strategies are therefore strategies to ensure that we stay relevant and thrive in a constantly changing world. The purpose is to come up with strategies that will enable us to capitalise on opportunities and mitigate threats, as well as ensure that we have the most robust set of plans, regardless of what scenarios may unfold.

Scenario planning and SWOT analysis have their roots in adaptive planning. The guiding idea behind generative planning is the belief that humans have the capacity to create and shape the environment. It is most exciting to begin with a clear picture of what we most want to build or create. Subscribers to the

In Asian philosophy, the adaptive orientation is the 'ying', representing the receiving and flexible orientation, while the generative orientation is represented by the 'yang' energy.

generative school of planning will probably resonate with Peter Drucker's famous quote that 'the best way to predict the future is to create it'. Generative strategies come from our aspirations – we pursue them because they will help us to create the future we truly desire, regardless of whether these conditions or capabilities exist today.

If organisations are living systems, which means we have the capacity to self-organise, self-sustain and regenerate, then we need to ensure these capacities are preserved through our interventions. In Asian philosophy, the adaptive orientation is the 'ying', representing the receiving and flexible orientation, while the generative orientation is represented by the 'yang' energy, creating and building, bringing that which did not exist into manifestation. It is the integration of ying-and-yang that brings about transformation in nature, a form of discontinuous change, where the new carries the 'DNA' of the old, but is different in every other way.

Enabling holistic learning conversations

The Dragonfly framework leverages the generative potential of Appreciative Inquiry, and at the same time builds in opportunities for people to have an open and honest dialogue about what worries them the most about the future in the context of a changing and increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment.

Appreciative Inquiry tends to focus primarily on the creation of generative strategies and design of 'provocative propositions'. Conversations about how to respond to the threats of the external environment are not typically designed into the 4-D cycle. This has been one of the most common criticisms of AI processes: it tends to be largely inwardly focussed, and does not allow enough room for negative discourse.

For change to be effective and to overcome the negative sentiment and deficit-orientation, strengths-oriented practitioners and scholars have emphasized the need to have more positive than negative dialogues, and more inquiry than advocacy. According to a study by Losada and Heaphy, the ratio for healthy and functional organisations is at least 3 positive: 1 negative – not 3:0. This was the principle behind the Dragonfly framework whereby the opportunity to address obstacles and challenges was built into the process, especially in the Awareness and Alignment stages.

While the 'five As' can be seen as stages, the entry point can really be any part of the process. One of the most natural places to begin the planning process is the Awareness stage, consistent with the Lewinian philosophy of a three-stage process involving 'unfreezing', overcoming inertia and dismantling the existing mind sets and defenses, before moving on to 'change' and re-'freezing'.

The following is a description of the Dragonfly framework and a summary of each of the key elements. The Sequoia Dragonfly represents a holistic strategic planning process and methodology that combines both adaptive and generative planning approaches.

Awareness

Strategic plans need to take into account what is changing in the external environment. We call this a 'window cleaning' process, so that we can better

perceive the complexity in the world external to the organisation. This ensures that our plans take into account the driving forces that are shaping and influencing our work.

The first step involves a typical STEEP² analysis, a process of 'window-cleaning', whereby members come together to have a dialogue about the critical driving forces or scenarios that might have an impact on the organisation's future. A pioneer of scenario planning, Pierre Wack, calls it a process for 're-perceiving the future'. People are given a chance to name their worries about the future, surface the 'undiscussables' and share openly about where they think the organisation needs to respond differently to unstoppable trends or critical uncertainties. Up to this point, the learning is focused on the external environment.

This is then complemented by a process of 'turning the mirror inwards'. The Discovery interview process of AI is a powerful process for the engagement of key stakeholders whereby people are invited to interview each other and asked to contribute their colleagues' stories to a central database.

The purpose is to gain a deeper insight into the strengths and success factors that give life to the organisation at its very best, and where the highest collective potential lies. The Discovery phase of AI will also surface what needs to change in order to get to our desired future. It is different from a traditional SWOT analysis, where the aim is to come up with an exhaustive list of factors that stakeholders consider to be weaknesses, but which may or may not be as important or relevant to the desired future.

Illumination of Insights and Implications

The focus of the Awareness phase is to heighten the community's appreciation of current reality and to illuminate insights and implications for the future. Better informed and sensitized with an updated understanding of the internal and external environment, people are more ready to engage in the process that involves co-creating the desired future. The new awareness and sensibilities also begin to shift the attitudes of people with respect to the organisation and one another.

Empathy increases and we achieve what Barbara Frederickson refers to as the 'broaden and build' effect of positive emotions. The task at this stage is to provide lots of support in getting the core team together to co-own the analysis of the data, whether it is data from the external trends or the discovery interviews. Ownership is nurtured right from the beginning.

Aspirations

The Aspiration phase is typically a high point. It involves a process of co-articulating a vision for a new and desired future state. The Discovery process deployed at the Awareness stage also involves an extension of the inquiry into the best of the future, through what we call the Dream Question in the interview protocol. The Dreams are harvested for the purpose of identifying common themes, and organisational members are involved at every step of the way, including the process of distilling and synthesising the collective wisdom of the whole community.

² STEEP is a mnemonic that stands for driving forces in the *Social, Technological, Environmental, Economic and Political* domains.

The freedom to be heard, together with the freedom to dream in community, unleashes the collective capacity for imagination. Whitney et al

The vision that emerges is one that the community can relate to, as the People's Association experienced. We have come to call the meetings at this stage the Aspirations summit, where we focus on clarifying the dream and desired future.

There could be multiple summits held at this stage; it is a bespoke process customised to the size, scale and scope of engagement unique to each organisation. In some of Sequoia's projects, the inquiry was conducted for three months prior to the summit phase, and the summit brought together the whole community into one room. In other situations, the summit was conducted over a few days where the community navigated the Awareness, Aspirations, Alignment and Accountability stages.

In a culture with an aversion to long meetings, people seem to prefer shorter one day meetings, spread over a longer period of time, rather to go through all the stages continuously in one seating. The breaks also enable room for people to breathe and reflect on what is essential, and the facilitators a chance to adapt the process in service of what is emerging.

Unleashing Inspiration and Imagination

The outcomes aimed for at the Aspirations stage are Inspiration and Imagination. Generativity is most evident at this stage of the process and people are inspired by the stories they have heard, as well as the bonds that are formed as a result of spending time together to co-articulate what matters most to them and why they chose to be part of the organisation in the first place. The freedom to be heard, together with the freedom to dream in community, unleashes the collective capacity for imagination (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

In the Dream phase, reality is suspended and people are transported into a time in the future where an organisation is at its best, and often during the Dream presentations (and the days following that), some of the most creative ideas emerge. The task at this stage is to capture and record all the Dream presentations, charts and ideas, not just for content but also the creative spirit of the people. Often the managers are 'surprised' that their staff are capable of such dreams and are delighted that the burden of creating the future is finally shared and embodied.

Alignment

Alignment is about charting a strategic roadmap for implementation and continued engagement of key stakeholders. This might involve a re-iteration of the above phases so that stakeholders have a chance to contribute to the 'vision-in-progress'. It involves the translation of the vision or dream into specific strategies and action plans. These initial ideas are further defined and developed and tested for proof of concept. Prototypes are proposed to translate the ideas into implementation plans, and feedback is gathered for further refinement.

In the NTUC, the strategic project teams that emerged at the Alignment phase were creatively named the 'Dragon Boats' to emphasise the need for synchronisation and synergy. A few of these 'Dragon Boats' were eventually transformed into autonomous departments and organisations, such as the formation of e2i, the Employment and Employability Institute, a national centre that provides job counseling and job placement services for workers displaced by the economic downturn.

Co-ownership of Innovations and Improvisations

Every design should embody the positive core of the organisation and is a representation of the desired future we wish to create. However, design and alignment is an ongoing and iterative process and may involve a combination of both innovation and improvisation. At any given point in time, the organisation would have 'inherited' an existing culture of systems and structures, skills and capabilities, even though these might no longer be in line with the newly articulated vision or dream. Alignment involves a review of the current products, services, systems, structures and capabilities to assess whether they are in line with the new vision. Where there is none, a new platform, programme or process may need to be created (innovation); if there is already an existing system or structure, it may be more cost-effective or practical to adapt or refine it accordingly. Not everything needs to be reinvented, and to improvise means to leverage on what is already there, and work with what is emerging.

Accountability

This is usually the final phase and lasts as long as it needs to. Stakeholders are empowered at the local level to implement the plans envisioned by the whole system. Implementation teams are empowered to create their own scorecard of performance measures of outcomes and impact, so that there is genuine ownership and motivation to follow-through. What is needed at this stage is also the involvement and engagement of key stakeholders who are responsible for these formal systems and structures. New funding might be needed to support a new idea, new product or service design. People may need to be equipped with new skills. New functions may need to be created. The change will also have to be communicated to the larger community so that there is support and involvement of business partners, suppliers, customers and the community-at-large.

Expansion of Influence and Impact

Genuine accountability emerges from ownership. As the new vision or strategic plans become public, the change gains momentum and new reality infrastructures being born eventually replace or eclipse the old. Support and coaching is most important at this stage. Leaders play an important role in providing the necessary resources, influence and political support to move the change forward. Change facilitation, stakeholder engagement and management is critical throughout the process, and especially pronounced as a key activity at this phase. The PA's strategy of producing the Master Plan book was to announce the arrival of the new; this took place strategically after two years of consultation and engagement.

Authenticity

The core ideology of the organisation comprises two components – the purpose (or mission) of the organization; and its core values. This represents the *raison d'être* for the organisation's existence and has also been described as the 'DNA' which gives the organisation its unique persona. Most organisations already have an existing mission and a set of core values. The data from the Discovery interviews will often help to illuminate whether these are still true and prevalent. If the answer is yes, then all that needs to be done is to affirm it. If they are not, the purpose and values will need to be refreshed or updated to better represent the core ideology. An affirmation of the core ideology provides a strong foundation for the vision and plans to grow. People feel more assured that they don't have to 'start from scratch' and that the purpose of the change is not just another corporate initiative from above. The beauty of Appreciative Inquiry

The beauty of Appreciative Inquiry is that it focusses not just on what is being changed, but also what is being conserved.

is that it focusses not just on what is being changed, but also what is being conserved.

Modelling the change with Integrity and Impeccability

An affirmation of the 'positive core' results in increased engagement in the sense of a positive attitude towards the organisation and its mission and values, and builds positive relationships between colleagues. Defending the rationale for the change becomes a non-issue when trust is established and everyone is empowered to take a lead and model the change with integrity and impeccability, not just the positional leaders alone. Power is shared and distributed where it needs to be, and the motivation for follow-through is enhanced.

Two case histories

Here are two stories that outline how the Dragonfly framework was applied to support two whole-system transformation projects, and what was involved at each stage of the process. One was referred to earlier: the transformation of the grassroots movement stewarded by the People's Association (PA); another case story involves a shared-vision building process for the Economic Development Board of Singapore.

Case history one: People's Association

The context

PA has been supporting community building and bonding since the 1950s. The purpose was to refresh and re-energise the grassroots movement, and its mission in helping to build a strong and cohesive Singapore for the next lap. With an influx of new citizens and an increasingly sophisticated population, PA needed to find new ways to reach out the community, and also re-energise and expand its pool of volunteers. The chairman of the board of People's Association was the prime minister himself, and it was his initiative to embark on this exercise. A strong grassroots movement is critical to the security, social stability and resilience of Singapore.

Awareness (year one)

A core group of leaders from the PA Board and a senior management team from PA were involved in all stages.

In order to ensure alignment at the Board of People's Association, the Deputy Chairman, Minister Lim Boon Heng first prepared the ground by bringing together the 84 advisers and key ministers in a dialogue (Corporate Planning Seminar 2008) that stretched over two full days, to emerge with a 'Vision for the Community', starting with affirming the best of the past, best of the present and best of the future of the grassroots movement.

Annual corporate planning seminars were held consecutively over a three year period as forums for the PA Board to check-in with one another on the state of the vision and master planning process.

AI was introduced to the participants, and discovery interviews were conducted amongst the key members of the board and with grassroots leaders; findings were processed through workshops to review and refresh the mission of PA.

To represent the need to engage the residents in community building, one of the participants suggested the vision tag-line 'Our Community, My Responsibility'.

Aspirations phase (year one)

'Vision for the Community' was born in the form of large paper sketches. The key strategies were identified and fleshed out using Open Space.

Enabling workshops were conducted to enable mini-aspirations summits to be conducted simultaneously at local communities.

The 'Vision for the Community' was articulated at the end of a two-day Aspirations workshop, the words and sentences were personally crafted by the 84 grassroots leaders and key ministers.

The process was simple, accessible and leveraged on lots of paper spaces which made the thought-process visible. This created a lasting bond amongst members and every word that went into the vision statement carried meaning and context for people involved.

'PA's vision for the Singapore community – 'A great home and caring community where we share our values, pursue our passions, fulfill our hopes and treasure our memories'

To represent the need to engage the residents in community building, one of the participants suggested the vision tag-line 'Our Community, My Responsibility'; to make it easier and simpler to communicate the intent widely. This was quickly accepted and honoured by the rest who were present.

Alignment phase (year two)

Before the Vision was formally launched, Alignment workshops were platforms for testing, consulting and inviting grassroots leaders to provide feedback and inputs for the vision, reflect on what resonated with them and what did not, and which elements were the most relevant for them at the local community level.

A high-point event was held to involve over 3000 grassroots leaders and was hosted by the Prime Minister, where the master plan book was launched and efforts affirmed.

Accountability phase (year three)

In year three, the intention was to follow through on the plans. Key impact indicators were identified by the local leaders themselves, and each community was encouraged to generate prototypes and pilot solutions at local communities.

Organisation redesign was carried out at the PA HQ, to better mirror and support the vision for the community. The most symbolic shift was perhaps change of the term 'Divisions' to 'Clusters' after the reorganisation to better represent the networked nature of the organisation and its new aspiration for a closer nexus of collaboration between PA and the community.

A review of core competencies of grassroots leaders was carried out to ensure the skills and competencies were aligned to the vision.

EDB unveiled its vision to be: • A Global Leader • A Great City • A Home in Asia For Business, Innovation and Talent

Case history two: Economic Development Board

The context

The Economic Development Board (EDB) wanted to find a way to engage internationally distributed teams in co-articulating a shared vision that all could identify with. The process would involve the board, the core management team comprising the top 40 directors, and up to 500 staff. The vision was launched in November 2010, just before the kick start of EDB's 50th anniversary celebrations. We had only four months to get through the whole vision-building process.

The only way was to enable those local groups to take charge of the process; what we learnt from the Enabling workshops process at PA gave us the confidence that this could work. EDB also had a very strong organisation development-oriented culture. At the same time, this meant that expectations of the process were going to be high. Being new to AI, the goal was to first engage the core team in a conversation about the external environment. We shared with them the Dragonfly framework, and explained the rationale behind the process. The model was well accepted and our clients at EDB liked the way it provided a systematic and systemic process for navigating the change. It also allowed us to clarify where, how and who would be involved at each stage.

Awareness

A core group comprising the chairman and the top management team was involved in a kick-off session and dialogue on external trends and uncertainties in August 2010. A half-day training on AI and the Discovery interview process was then conducted to prepare the divisional directors as facilitators of the process with their teams.

Divisional directors were given a toolkit for engaging staff in geographically distributed teams. The process included steps for setting up the paired interviews (Discovery), and a guided process for drafting ground-up vision mind-maps to represent the aspirations of all members of the Division. The interview data was further summarised and key themes from 50 divisional mind-maps was synthesised and distilled into an integrated master vision mind-map to represent the collective voices of 500 staff.

Aspirations

This was posted on the staff portal, and all were invited to reflect and offer further comments to refine the words and the final vision was launched to kick start the 50th year anniversary celebrations for EDB.

Finally, in November 2010, EDB unveiled its Vision for Singapore:

A Global Leader

A Great City

A Home in Asia For Business, Innovation and Talent

As well, its long-time role as the chief economic architect for the economy of Singapore was affirmed. EDB also asked further reflected on the implications for themselves as an organisation, and developed a mirroring internal vision – the thinking was that in order to make Singapore a global leader, great city and home in Asia, EDB needs to be 'a Global Leader (in what we do), a Great Organisation, and a Home (for all our people).'

The spirit of inquiry is about asking questions from a 'genuine place of not knowing', of openness and curiosity.

Alignment and accountability

The strategies were refreshed in the light of the renewed mission and vision. One year later, the 2011 staff Engagement Survey showed a marked improvement in the sense of connection to the vision and purpose of EDB. This was evidently linked to and attributable to the shared vision process.

True inquiry is, by nature, appreciative

As I reflect on the essence of Appreciative Inquiry, I begin to re-appreciate the timeless essence that true inquiry is always appreciative. My mentor and coach, Diane Cory, once taught me that the spirit of inquiry is about asking questions from a 'genuine place of not knowing', of openness and curiosity.

AI is a deliberate study of what gives life to a system when it is at its best, and it is also about understanding the concerns that exist in current reality. It is not just about crafting questions to surface only what is good, but also what needs to be heard or understood, so that we can fully appreciate reality in its totality. Reality certainly also includes the dormant hopes and dreams that already exist in the hearts and minds of the people in our organisations and communities.

As long as we understand and stay true to the principles, AI interventions can be invaluable opportunities for us to host honest, open dialogues about what is not working, so that we may work towards aligning our energies to create what is good, important and truly worthy of people's commitment.

The purpose of AI is human flourishing

Martin Seligman and his ongoing research on positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania outlined five key elements that are present when flourishing exists. He calls PERMA: • Positive emotions • Engagement • Resonant relationships (or harmony) • Meaning • Accomplishment. The most life-giving aspect of AI interventions to me is the elevation of hope and meaning that I have witnessed personally through my client's stories.

We change the world by changing the quality of relationships between people. As we reach out to understand one another's hopes, dreams and ideas, we build lasting bonds. As our quality of relationships improves, so does the quality of our collective thinking. When the quality of our collective thinking expands, we create higher quality plans and actions, which then gives rise to better results. This reinforces the bonds between people that were there in the first place. This virtuous reinforcing loop is the foundation of a strong and sustainable organisation and community. Economic capital cannot be sustained without first building social capital.

Teach and liberate self-directed change at every level of the system

One of the most important take-aways for me is the fact that AI is a very intuitive methodology and is accessible even to the most junior person in the organisation. The idea of teaching the Dragonfly framework and AI through the Enabling workshops liberated in us the idea that summits can be held at the local level and carried out through 'cascading processes', in the same way that inquiry is decentralised and happens asynchronously. Dee Hock, in *The Birth of the Chaordic Age*, shared the principle that 'decisions that can be made at the rim should not be made at the center'; the idea that everyone can be involved in strategic planning is perhaps one of the most radical shifts we are seeing in our field today.

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